

## **On the Subjectivity of African-American Heroines: Seeking a Theoretical Contrast between Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982) and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970)**

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### **Abstract**

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982) won her both the Pulitzer Prize and the American Book Award for Fiction. The heroine Celie and her development of female subjectivity are reminiscent of, and in sharp contrast to, that of Pecola, the heroine in *The Bluest Eye* (1970) written by Toni Morrison, a Nobel Prize laureate in 1993. Walker allows her heroine to use a first-person perspective to speak from her own voice in order to reclaim back her female agency in resistance to the male holders of power who oppress and exploit colored women as a whole. Morrison is however concerned about the white norms of beauty and cultural citizenship as well as the psychological hegemony inherent in them. This paper uses Thomas Metzinger's Self-model Theory of Subjectivity (SMT) as the conceptual framework to compare how one heroine differs from the other in terms of their respective development of subjectivity. The reason why *The Color Purple* and *The Bluest Eye* are chosen for literary comparison is that both heroines are highly traumatized and allegedly believe they look ugly. In addition, both authors use color imagery of either purple or blue to evoke the (non-)assertiveness of one's ethnicity, with the backgrounds all set in the rural community under the caste system of the Jim Crow laws in the first half of the twentieth century. It is concluded that Celie can consciously experience the phenomenal property of her selfhood and go through the liberating and self-defining stages of development that are both transgressive and transformative enough to qualify her as a transient woman. In contrast, Pecola is permanently mired in a state of phenomenal transparency where she is so overwhelmed by out-of-body experience as to become an intrinsically disembodied spirit. This paper pioneers to use SMT as a conceptual tool not only to explain the divergent courses of development in each heroine's phenomenal self, but also to investigate the theoretical issues regarding the experiential perspectivity of one's epistemic subjectivity and how that subjectivity is being disintegrated.

**Keywords:** feminism, subjectivity, Metzinger, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison

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## 論美國非裔女性的主體意識：比較《最藍的眼睛》與《紫色姊妹花》

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### 摘要

愛麗絲華克得過普立茲小說獎，在她的《紫的顏色》（另譯《紫色姊妹花》）中，女主角 Celie 是一位因貌醜而對自己缺乏自信的黑人女性，剛開始她也面臨了女主角 Pecola 在湯尼莫里森《最藍的眼睛》中所遭遇的困境，而活在自我否定中自暴自棄。可是因緣際會，她透過好友以及失散多年的妹妹的啟蒙，使得女性意識逐漸抬頭，也學會了以批判觀點看待美國社會的族群與父權問題，以及運用後殖民觀點批判跨國的奴隸制度。反之，於 1993 年得到諾貝爾文學獎的湯尼莫里森，將她的女主角設計得全無超越性，完全符合了波娃在她的《第二性》中定義女性為 immanence 的所有特點。Pecola 的女性自主意識極低，她完全依賴男人的肯定，並且極度崇拜白人優越論中的美學觀點。她渴望被同化進白人的世界，欣然模仿白人的生活模式與價值觀，不時以自己族群的外貌特徵與文化標誌為恥，且盲目追求大眾文化所灌輸的時尚形象。本研究透過 Thomas Metzinger 的主體意識自我模型理論 (Self-model Theory of Subjectivity)，去解析美國非裔女性的主體意識。結論發現《紫的顏色》的女主角 Celie 能夠有意識地經驗其自我的 phenomenal property，並且在此過程中達到自我提昇的轉型。而《最藍的眼睛》的女主角 Pecola 深陷在現象透明的沼澤中，使其內在萎縮成脫離實體的靈魂、而逐漸沉淪。本篇論文首創以 SMT，去分析小說中的女主角，並以現象自我 (phenomenal self) 以及主體與客體之間的辯證關係 (intentionality relation) 為觀念工具，去檢視自我的觀點性 (perspectivity) 與觀點角度 (perspectivalness)。之所以選中以上兩部作品作為理論的對比，是因為作品皆大量運用顏色意象，去突顯族群圖騰的美學差異；此外兩位作者的當代性強，又是美國非裔文學界顯赫的女性主義代表人物，因此極有學術上對照的價值。

**關鍵詞：**愛麗絲華克、湯尼莫里森、女性主義、主體意識、自我模型理論

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## Introduction

Subjectivity is inherently defined as something that is formed through countless numbers of interactions within society or with the surrounding environment. It is a process of one's individuation or socialization, if one refuses to isolate oneself in a self-contained environment. In other words, the living totality of a given society continuously undergoes transformation through which culture and subjectivity interactively shape each other in the areas of communities, political systems, the economy, and the natural world. Subjectivity presupposes a subject or the form of an existing being that manifests itself through constant changes of self-awareness. As that subject experiences a wide variety of phenomena, the content of that existing being will produce or constitute the subjectivity of that subject. As a result, the process, in terms of the alteration in becoming a subject, or so-called "subjectification" or "subjectivation" in French <sup>1</sup> is highly philosophical, because of the ontological <sup>2</sup> nature inherent in the transient or permanent existence of the self and the subject.

The Self-model Theory of Subjectivity (SMT) <sup>3</sup> is an interdisciplinary approach to investigating the phenomenology of consciousness and the self. Since its core content is the phenomenal self, the experiences of ownership, body-centered gender identity, and the long-term unity between beliefs and attitudes are brought into focus. Also of concern are thoughts, emotions, perceptions, and sensations that make up the psychic experience of a subject who, through the passage of time or the transformation of space, undergoes transformation in terms of the fluid in its subjective relationship with our world. The degree to which this subject can retain its permanency consists in its potentials to develop its subjectivity. As part of specific experiences and realistic organizations, subjectivity makes it possible for one to have one's distinction from others, who are usually regarded as alien, hostile, and incomprehensible. Given that cultural differences result in an alternate experience of existence, people use different means to form or modify their subjectivity.

As a corollary, objectification of the females and the oppressive nature of patriarchy are always the major issues targeted at by feminist writers. They generally believe that the

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<sup>1</sup> In Culpitt's dissertation, subjectification is defined as a philosophical concept that refers to the construction of the individual subject (iv). This word was originally coined by a French philosopher and historian Paul-Michel Foucault who believes that one should think differently about things "taken for granted." In order to "think differently" about a multitude of practices, one should use one's subjectification of "limit-experiences" to introspect on the patterning that constructs the current discourses of political and social policy. Culpitt further contends that various "rationalizations" shape the process of subjectification which, being "ethical and aesthetic," partakes of knowledge and power (37; 46).

<sup>2</sup> Existentialist feminism extensively uses ontology as a conceptual tool to conduct a philosophical study of women's being, becoming, subjectivity and existence. Please see Rosemarie Tong's *Feminist Thought*. Chapter Seven.

<sup>3</sup> Also known as the theory of phenomenal consciousness, this model is proposed by Thomas Metzinger (2004), a German scholar of philosophy, psychiatry, and neurosciences, who argues that we are perceiving "representations" of reality rather than perceiving reality directly. When these systematic representational experiences, transported by the data structures or mechanisms of the data, are connected with our subjective experience underlying episodic subject-object relations, the phenomenal property of selfhood is generated.

perspective from which a woman views her humanity and how she interacts with others manifest the growth, stagnation, or retrogression of her subjectivity that is perceived as crucial in the approach to women's enlightenment.

An overall literature review reveals that there have been many voluminous researches on black female identities. Among them, Lynette D. Myles's *Female Subjectivity in African American Women's Narratives of Enslavement* (2009) bears the greatest resemblance to this paper's title. Myles's innovative dissertation theorizes how American black females engender and reclaim realities in which their consciousness or subjectivity can develop from pained and marginal existence to power and transformation. However, the African American women's narratives under Myles's study do not include those of contemporary writers such as Toni Morrison and Alice Walker who are still alive. Besides, what she theorizes is simply the stages through which African American females develop their subjectivity, without pointing out exactly how such female subjectivity is being formed or being lost. This paper seeks to continue Myles's academic interest in subjectivity, deviating however a great deal of its attention toward the theoretical issues centering around the (de)formation of such subjectivity. To accomplish this goal, this paper pioneers to borrow Metzinger's SMT as a conceptual tool so as to explain the contrast between Celie and Pecola in the process of textual analysis.

The reason why this paper chooses *The Color Purple* and *The Bluest Eye* for literary comparison is that both authors are contemporary world renowned African American feminist writers who are highly concerned about the issues of race and gender. They coincidentally use color imagery of either purple or blue to evoke the (non-)assertiveness of one's ethnicity. Each of the female protagonists they create in their novels fictitiously lived in the rural community under the caste system of the Jim Crow laws in the first half of the twentieth century. Both black girls endure family incest, abuse, chaos, and hardship, and allegedly believe they look ugly. However, their subjectivity and selfhood as an African American female are entirely different in the course of their lives. This fact provides a perfect contrast for this paper to conduct a comparative study.

Walker's arrangement of a new radical alternative and outlook for her colonized <sup>4</sup> heroine is flawless. With a consummate skill and sensitivity, Walker writes her novel in a captivating form similar to Celie's repetitive and never ending letters to God and to her sister Nettie. Written from her own perspective, such an original and outstanding epistolary form of writing enables readers to thumb through the pages quickly, allowing the story to go by as if one was reading somebody else's diary or journal. Although full of adult language and explicit sexual content, this novel never plays cheap with the readers' emotions because it brings to light issues such as incest, teenage marriage and child birth, as well as the ultimate transition from being slaves to full-fledged individuals. Walker's style is unique and realistic in that Celie's letters, which are full of Southern English, resembles an actual journal.

In contrast, Morrison's novel embodies the Negro writing that, as observed by Neal

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<sup>4</sup> Slavery or Jim Crow segregation is considered to be an internal form of colonization by sociologist Edna Bonacich in her "Class Approaches to Ethnicity and Race" (1980).

(273) and Davis (142), speaks directly and authentically to blacks in order to alert them to the cohesive African American cultures and its continuity from the African traditions.<sup>5</sup> Morrison's writing also conforms to what Clark and Clark suggest that self-loathing and lack of self-esteem on the part of blacks are engineered by a "racialized" society (172). Such a notion becomes the standard by which she can evaluate black females and the growth of their consciousness, as well as other cultural values indigenous to their ethnic roots. The thematic discussion of this paper employs SMT to elucidate the contrast between the growth of Celie's subjectivity and the atrophy of it in Pecola.

### **I. Metzinger's Self-Model Theory of Subjectivity (SMT)**

As a theoretical entity, the notion of a self in Metzinger's voluminous work entitled *Being No One* (2004) refers to a representational content with the dynamic content of the phenomenal self simply serving as an integrated process of the cognitive processing, emotional situations, and the bodily sensations. Objects, scenes, and contextual information are all further examples of phenomenal holism in which subjects and objects are consciously represented in different sequences, as is the phenomenal experience of "self in the act of knowing" (144). The concept of "representation" in epistemological uses is analogous to the concept of "simulation" (63). What differs between both is the recognition that "phenomenal representations form a distinct class of experiential states, as opposed to simulations," and that there exists a mental representation of the self which is at any time available.

As a self-creating and self-persisting dynamical subsystem of the mind, the phenomenal self, or the so-called "the phenomenal property of selfhood," is a representational construct. In such a self-constructed dynamical phenomenon, human selfness approximates the whole mind without attaching deliberative or reflective consciousness to the primal awareness of the self. Understood as such, the phenomenal self functions as a full-scale defense and elaboration of the premise that phenomenal continuity keeps humans in existence. What implies in overtones is that any rupture in physical or psychological continuity will put an end to one's existence with the least to do with, or irrespective of, the flow of one's phenomenal consciousness. As quoted in Metzinger's theory (159): "a phenomenal self is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for a given system to develop a full-blown, consciously experienced first-person perspective."

According to Metzinger's theory of phenomenal consciousness and selfhood, not all the conscious beings have a conscious self. In fact, many are not an individual possessing an unchangeable essence in the sense of philosophical metaphysics. Neither a substance nor a thing, the self operates under a "transparent" self-model that, once phenomenal experience is satisfied by a given representational system, leads to the emergency of a

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<sup>5</sup> When receiving an interview from Thomas LeClair in 1981, Toni Morrison talked a great deal about her own writing (Taylor-Guthrie 125).



phenomenal self. As quoted from Metzinger:

Transparency and opacity are properties of phenomenal states. Because selfhood emerges through the phenomenal transparency of the system model, the unconscious phenomenal model of the intentionality relation could only portray a system in the act of knowing, but never a self in the act of knowing... It could at best be only a weak, functional form of internally modeled knowledge acquisition epistemic subjectivity is anchored in the phenomenal property of selfhood. If we ask for a better understanding of epistemic subjectivity, we always ask for a better understanding of the phenomenal self as subject. (621-22)

Metzinger suggests that the phenomenal self in a special form of inner darkness possesses simply a representational content with its self-consciousness inaccessible to the representational content of its subjective experience. Resulting from the closure in a self-representing system, the phenomenal self realizes itself in the absence of information or self-knowledge. If an organism has such a phenomenal self, instead of simply in complex brain states, its selfhood will become a representational construct of the phenomenal property with which to intrinsically and dynamically represent the organism as a whole. As quoted in Metzinger's theory:

The phenomenology of perspectivalness is the phenomenology of being someone. The first phenomenal target property here is the property of consciously experienced "selfhood." The experiential perspectivity of one's own consciousness is constituted by the fact that phenomenal space is centered by a phenomenal self: it possesses a focus of experience, a point of view. (157)

As further defined by Metzinger, phenomenal transparency means:

... the inability of a given system to experience, that is, to consciously represent, the vehicle-content distinction from the first-person perspective. Transparency creates the illusion of naïve realism: the inability to recognize a self-generated representation as a representation. (292)

According to Metzinger, higher forms of cognitive self-consciousness constitute a "consciously available self-world boundary, and together with it generates a genuinely inner world." He further argues that the phenomenal properties of agency are constituted "preattentively," and automatically on the "attentional, cognitive, and behavioral levels" (263). The dynamic content of the phenomenal self is also the content of the conscious self in terms of its development, within a given information-processing system, into the conscious content in the process of phenomenal representations. As property representations give rise to consciousness that basically emerges from matter, the

representational property of self-modeling will transform itself into consciously experienced phenomenal property of selfhood. Metzinger (158) calls such phenomenal selfhood "prereflexive self-intimacy," meaning "spontaneous and effortless way of inner acquaintance, of being in touch with, and phenomenally of being infinitely close to" one's self.

A phenomenal subject, as opposed to a mere phenomenal self, is a model of the system as acting and experiencing. What is needed is a theory about how the intentionality relation, the relation between subject and object, is itself depicted on the level of conscious experience. Phenomenal subjectivity makes phenomenal intersubjectivity possible, namely, in all those cases in which the object component of an individual first-person perspective is formed by another subject. (159)

As further elaborated by Metzinger (408), the object component in the subject-object relation is an "action goal, not yet existing in an egocentric frame of reference." The phenomenal property of agency must be exemplified at precisely the moment when the representation of a possible behavior "becomes real." Briefly introduced as such, SMT can hopefully be used as a conceptual framework for textual analysis in the following.

## **II. A Split Consciousness without the Self**

As *The Color Purple* opens, the fourteen-year-old black girl Celie has already been raped, abused, degraded, and impregnated by her stepfather Alphonso, who later takes her two children away without leaving so much as a word. According to Donna Haisty Winchell (90), America, in order to maintain power and tradition among the people, must sustain a presence as intimate and accessible as the family. As a signifier of uncorrupted and disinterested love, the family is envisioned by Walker as the shelter for women who grow in a range of personal and social identities. Walker believes that a woman should never be content with being "good" in the eyes of others. Rather, her behavior should be so willful, outrageous, courageous, and determined as to de-legitimize the political institutions and language of racist and patriarchal violence. In *In Search of Our Mothers' Garden* (xi; 356), Walker suggests that one woman, while anxious to know more and in greater depth than sanctioned by the patriarch, might be "asking another for her underwear" and might love other women "sexually or non-sexually."

Gerri Bates (103) emphasizes that *The Color Purple* operates by "womanist" <sup>6</sup>values and has little to do with wars, the occupation of lands, or the birth or death of great men. As observed by Cheung (163), feminist scholars such as Nancy Chodorow and Elizabeth Abel aim to unveil the objective and dispassionate quality and the modes of coercion and exploitation concealed behind the Father's authority and guidance. However, as Berlant

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<sup>6</sup> Walker (1983: xi) defines the term "womanist" as a "black feminist or feminist of color" with "outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior."

(833) asserts, *The Color Purple* reproduces a negative, anti-patriarchal, and anti-elitist tone by replacing political articulation with the construction of “an aesthetic/symbolic logic”<sup>7</sup> as a new domestic, though not trivial, issue of concern. <sup>8</sup>Bobo (335) suggests that this novel has sped up the momentum of a larger movement of black women acting as cultural workers who seek to create and maintain images of black women “that are based on black women’s constructions, history, and real-life experiences.”

As contended by Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folk* (qtd. in Franklin 214-15), the discursive self-alienation of blacks is usually expressed through the multiple inversions of language, a phenomenon that can be everywhere exemplified by *The Color Purple*. When Squeak ventures forth to free Sofia out of the prison, she is raped. Squeak knows when to remain submissive and when to exercise the double talk strategy and the hypocrisy of feminine abnegation so that she can seduce the warden (CP 88-89; 92). <sup>9</sup>Unlike Celie’s being raped by her stepfather, this mode of representation prefigures Squeak’s learning to lie and to play words because social mastery in wordplay and double talk can produce a discursive situation that, instead of marking black women as pariahs in the patriarchal public sphere, ironically initiates Squeak into the rank and file as a “womanist.” She restores her name as Mary Agnes and takes to singing because she becomes aware that, in order to become a woman among women, she must fight the delegitimizing pressure of female marginality by using the pure note of music as what Abbandonato calls “an elaborate act of female signifying” (1108). So construed, the female speech in the libratory distinction between music and words reflects the privileges articulated by both Shug and Mary Agnes as speaking women who find their expression through the masterful deployment of language in song, lies, or deadly silences.<sup>10</sup>

The violated ground of rape and humor in *The Color Purple*, can best illustrate Du

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<sup>7</sup> According to Rich (230), as the novel opens its discourse, the enforced privacy of Celie’s letters is elevated to an aesthetic, rather than political, representation, prefiguring the eventual awakening of her sexuality. Anderson (131) also contends that the discourse is laden with the utopian force that is associated with the spirit of women’s everyday relations. To him, the “aesthetic logic” in *The Color Purple* can be envisioned as a new form of “nationalist epistemology.”

<sup>8</sup> Froula (641-42) contends that the issue of domesticity in *The Color Purple* operates neither according to the political language or historical values of patriarchal power; nor does it correspond to the patriarchal concerns of the historical novel.

<sup>9</sup> References to *The Color Purple* are to the edition published by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich in New York, in 1992, and will be cited parenthetically as CP in the text. Likewise, references to *The Bluest Eye* are to the edition published by Signet Books, in 1970 and will be cited parenthetically as BE in the text.

<sup>10</sup> Celie’s pleasure of playing words such as mixing “hospitality” with “horsepity” is first displayed when she sees Corinne carry her stolen child Oliva (CP 15). Since the pun on “hospitality” is revealed within the female context, Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ believes that such a joke will produce a power to threaten his control over the discursive space. In his eyes, a woman should remain an object, posed but not constituted, without knowing that Celie can be able to produce a multi-vocal discourse instead of being simply a victimized shadow masked by dumbness and muted utterance as before. Intrinsic to all the ironic repartee about “uncle Tomming” (CP 90) uttered by either Shug, Squeak, or Sofia is actually their eagerness, when facing sexism and racism, to resort to complex negotiation to attain legitimacy. If necessary, they even resort to backtalk to redress the sexually and racially fractured situations. Nettie’s tendency to use the near-homophone “cucumber” to satirize the national pride of “Columbus” is another case in point (CP 9). It seems to be in this sense that the colonized discourse in *The Color Purple* is simultaneously twisted by two opposite discursive modes with external irony being countered by internal “polemics” (Willimon 319).



Bois's "double consciousness" of African-Americans.<sup>11</sup> According to Abbandonato (1106-07), women experience "a double consciousness" in relation to "their representation in film: seduced into identification with women of their non-representation in that construct."<sup>12</sup> Morrison's Pecola and her infatuation with the feminine images as popularized by mass culture can best exemplify this argument.

The body of an American black as the site of identity contains different modes of self alienation when he or she "shuttles" in and out of subjectivity with his or her cultural and racial status as an object. Berlant contends that, in *The Color Purple*, the internalized awareness on the part of a hostile audience forms "the ground of negation" (838) or the context of "priori negation" (846) that inevitably leads to the production of double consciousness for the marginalized fictional characters. Taking on an almost allegorical charge, the irony or sarcasm used by most African-Americans seems to produce a negating effect of cultural delegitimation as if only the negative space reserved by whites for black cultures could signify something. Since blackness has lost its power to signify, Afro-American females are juxtaposed within a context of double erasure. A similar notion is also applied to gender relations.

As a black female writer, Morrison, however, seeks to adjudicate claims by using complementary discourses that construe the sexual. This provides an alternative perspective that reproduces the complicated subjectivity of even the most irredeemable characters with whom Morrison empathizes. Along with the deployment of one episode after another, Morrison in her *The Bluest Eye* examines the split consciousness of Pecola and other crazy women such as Aunt Julia. Gradually readers become aware that the meaning of blackness profoundly shapes the experience of gender with womanhood being deeply affected by the experience of race. Henderson proclaims, when Morrison talks as a black writer to white readers, she moves along the axis of race. In other words, when she talks as a female to male audiences, she has changed the axis of race to that of gender (2001: 20). Moving between these two axes enables Morrison, like Walker after her, to expand her readers' understanding. As a result, readers can structurally comprehend that, as suggested by Froula (643), the vulnerability of distorted black "female subjectivity" is deliberately produced by a dominant culture equipped with biased social and economic mechanisms.

When being alienated from each other, members in the black community cannot

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<sup>11</sup> As a matter of fact, Harpo's first wife Sofia has a voice of racial and sexual resentment that is the loudest of all characters. She never allows Harpo to dominate or beat her. Her resistance to sexual coercion means her refusal to partake of the discourse that proclaims the "unworthiness" of Afro-American females. However, after being released out of the jail, she is forced into service as Mrs. Mayor's maid. Entering the servitude means she must conform to the "double discourse" in which whites require of Afro-Americans to participate.

<sup>12</sup> The traditional views of representation still conceive of language as articulations or reproductions of a prior presence, even though its non-transparency and its problematic relation to the world are gradually put into question; namely, more and more critics tend to deny language the capacity to imitate a non-linguistic reality (Rimmon-Kenan 7).

locate their placement in American Culture, because they have completely internalized the dominant white standards of value and beauty. In this regard, Morrison illustrates the extent to which mass commodity culture fails to sanction the representations of its context. As each ethnic member divides within himself or herself, he or she fosters doubleness in the form of self-denials or self-distortions that are approved of by the popular iconographic representation.

In the final disappearing act of *The Bluest Eye*, the “ugliness” of Pecola’s body is dissolved in and absolved by the blue eyes that can be seen only by her and her new imaginary friend. In her madness and isolation, she cannot distinguish the boundaries between self and other, sense and nonsense, inside and outside. Her mother Pauline’s definition of strength, beauty, and youth is also foreclosed because she defines the foresaid pleasures in the terms she has learned from film. Both the daughter and the mother vicariously live white experience as a denial of self and blackness. They use estimation and appropriation to see themselves in iconographic images which exist only in the domain beyond their reach, something intangible at all in their everyday environment. In the wake of their abstractions of whites into what Willis calls “reified” subjects (174), they cash in on one dream and abandon another, resulting in a transition from order to chaos, not in line with the trajectory in the prefatory Dick and Jane story.

### **III. Developing One’s Gender and Racial Identities**

It is indisputable that, in the first half of *The Color Purple*, gender oppression circulates around Celie’s gender vulnerability. However, patriarchal subjugation of women gradually develops into racial violence as the novel deploys itself. When racism succeeds sexism as the cause of social violence, many problems concerning Celie’s identity are released into the forefront. It gradually dawns upon readers that horrific systematic sexual violence is simply parts of social violence with distinct language and logics of social relations governed by intricate Jim Crow racial and sexual codes.

Celie is envious of Sofia who asserts herself in her defiance against her husband and father-in-law. Sofia derives her strength or courage from her very tight-knit relationships with other five sisters, an awareness that deep ties among women are a means of combating sexism. Here readers observe Walker’s idea of the varied and multilayered nature of intimacy among women. Walker seemingly explores the spectrum of possibilities in sexuality and sexual orientation, insinuating that sexuality is more complex and more difficult to define than race. Instead of two opposite choices, sexuality is not an issue that can be easily polarized between homosexuality and heterosexuality. There is no denying that Celie is sexually aroused when seeing Shug’s “titties near bout to the nipple,” but such a body-centered sensation or self-eroticism is based broadly on gratitude, admiration, friendliness, and camaraderie:

All the men got they eyes glued to Shug’s bosom. I got my eyes glued there too. I feel my nipples harden under my dress. My little button sort of perk up too.

Shug, I say to her in my mind, Girl, you looks like a real good time, the Good Lord knows you do. (CP 79)

Celie writes to God how she feels when she hears Shug sing Miss Celie's song to her:

First she hum it a little, like she do at home. The she sing the words. It all about some no count man doing her wrong, again. But I don't listen to that part. I look at her and I hum along a little with the tune. First time somebody made something and name it after me. (CP 72)

Equally noteworthy is Celie's confession to God that, after she successfully nurses Shug back to good health, Shug's feeling toward Celie is more out of maternal tenderness than sexual attraction.

Even though Celie is a married woman with two children, Shug pronounces her a virgin in her own terms. According to the traditional definition, a girl loses her virginity the moment she is penetrated by a man. However, Shug teaches her a new way of interpretation in which the loss of virginity results from a girl having sex with a man and finding it physically and emotionally pleasurable at the same time. Shug's pronouncement of Celie as a virgin and renaming her as Miss Celie means that Celie has acquired a new identity literally or figuratively. Such renaming not only empowers Celie to develop a new ability to interpret the world, but also introduces another dimension of Celie's submerged story. On the one hand, Shug enables Celie to understand the existence of an alternative to the mainstream ways of thinking and perceiving imposed on her by the dominant members of society; on the other, she trains Celie to recognize such an alternative so as to nurture and develop a sense of control for the growth of her independence.

In her *The Bluest Eye*, as argued by Smith (55), that Morrison however attempts to indicate the fact that African-American cultures and histories and the positive images and stories inherent in them have been effaced by all-pervasive commodity capitalism whose "representation" is based on the visible models of the white images. Unfortunately, such a mass culture industry is insidious in that it is premised on consumption and the normative values conducive to it. As a result, prosperity is encouraged at the expense of class as well as ethnic and racial differences. As commented by Willis (183-84), when "social contradictions" and antagonisms are purportedly erased or concealed, African-Americans suffer double layers of reversal or "negation" because their racial forms and cultural distinctiveness are deprived of any chance of representation. Such disallowance produces damaging effects, especially for black women, because commodity culture intersects with sex, causing their bodies to become the domain marked by the colonization and chauvinism of white cultures.

Morrison uses her narrative tactic to represent black female subjectivity in the context of the subdominant ghetto as the complex reality which is shifting and layered in nature. Along the axes of economic prosperity as promised by commodity capitalism, ethnic differences have been seemingly smoothed away to the extent that social conflicts

have been resolved and, above all, replaced by equal desire to consume on the part of blacks and whites alike. However, Fredric Jameson (145) argues in his “Reification and Utopia in Mass culture” that false images in connection with sex conjured up by mass culture intentionally ignore the race-specific attributes of African-American consumers. The following is Pecola’s fascination with little Mary Jane, a picture on the candy wrapper:

Smiling white face. Blond hair in gentle disarray, blue eyes looking at her out of a world of clean comfort. The eyes are petulant, mischievous. To Pecola they are simply pretty. She... love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane. (BE 50)

In fact, Pecola, through an abdication of self, endlessly reproduces images of feminine beauty in everyday objects and consumer goods such as the model of white baby dolls, Shirley Temple cups, and Mary Jane candies. Like all the other black females in the ghetto, Pecola believes that black bodies should conform to the aesthetic criteria homogenized by gender and cultural production purportedly engineered by the host society. These criteria fail to distinguish any ethnic distinctiveness beyond that of the majority whites. The fact that Pecola eventually believes that she has acquired blue eyes indicates that many black girls have been socialized, or to be more specific, “sexualized,” into the images onto which they project themselves in line with the mainstream society. Little wonder, Pecola cannot see her images in herself and eventually cease to be seen at all.

Like Pecola, quite a few black female characters foster a sense of lack and unworthiness because there are countless limitations in the present actions. In his *Female Sexualization*, Haug argues that, as girls mature, they will be socialized into a process of femininity production; namely, the subordination within and the “sexualization” of various body parts as the site of multiple discourses comprising femininity (211-12). Such female sexualization enables one to see oneself in the body of another. In their interaction with mass culture, black females are unable to present their specific stories, histories, and bodies because all these appear invisible in the eyes of whites.

Morrison’s comparison between various characters and the seemingly idyllic lives of Dick and Jane unavoidably breeds resentment and class consciousness which are not accounted for in the representations of mass culture. In Morrison’s eyes, to counteract the oppressiveness of the present, black women delusively delimit their psychological unrest and dissatisfaction by maximizing the extent to which mass culture<sup>13</sup> makes the process of self-denial a pleasurable sexual experience.

#### **IV. Resistance to or Acceptance of Racialized Gender Identities?**

Not unlike Pecola, Walker’s Celie is first seen as completely subdued by men

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<sup>13</sup> American Marxism perceives the social impact of mass media and the mass culture they create as highly suppressive, because they “isolate individuals from one another” and forcefully integrate the public into the “norms” of everyday life. Please see *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. by Andrew Arato, 1982. p. 103.

without autonomy and assertiveness. As Celie's sense of self is awakened by Shug, she becomes aware that her perception of herself should differ from how other people perceive her. As her self-analysis becomes increasingly developed and complicated, increased self-awareness leads to the growth of sexual awakening through Shug's education. Before, she believed that Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ beats her for "being me," but she is now being educated into believing that she can take control of her own situation by telling her own story and developing her "sense of self" (Henderson 2001: 74). It dawns on readers that Shug and Celie take on each other's attributes and form a reciprocal impact between them. For one thing, Shug transforms Celie into a sexually vibrant and assertive woman; for another, Celie softens Shug with love and care, rendering her gentler and more nurturing. It is at this moment that she is elevated to a level of female exemplum as "sister Celie" (CP 41) <sup>14</sup>

In retrospect, Shug is exactly the type of instructor from whom Celie learns desire and self-fulfillment, as well as other practical, technical, and symbolic human values. Specifically included in her instruction is the standard connection between male sexual desire and the male desire to downgrade women. <sup>15</sup>

What Celie emphasizes in her Mass speech (CP 288) is the dream of founding an Afro-American nation constituted by rich, complex, and ambiguous cultures. For this purpose, blacks should struggle for the separatist movements, but, as Butler-Evans comments, they are "marginalized by its absence from the narration" (166).<sup>16</sup> Just as the novel stages the instance of American blacks' struggle to clarify their national identity, so Celie sets up, or, in Selzer's word, "resituates" her subjectivity within the framework of Afro-American national consciousness without using patriarchal language and its power of logic (68). In this context, Winchell (95) uses the term "twin self" to highlight the conflict between the abused Celie and her own inner self — that part of herself that eventually makes her fight back.

Walker also aims to enter the communal model of utopian representation, allowing the partnership between sisterhood and economic independence to play a central role in the novel. Lupton (413-14) suggests that Celie's empowerment is actually accompanied

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<sup>14</sup> As the mistress of Celie's husband, Shug cultivates in Celie an awareness that her life is worth loving and caring about. She also teaches Celie how to read, fight back, and love and, most importantly, how to appreciate her own specialness and uniqueness. Rich (209-10) uses the term of "lesbian continuum" to describe how the overturning of gender identity in the novel has spanned the whole spectrum of women's friendships and sisterly solidarity. In Lupton's words (416), Walker "defiantly subverts the heterophobic quest for love at the heart of the Cinderella Line, offering instead a melange of fluctuating woman/woman/sister/man/brother/family relationship."

<sup>15</sup> *The Color Purple* does not seem to appeal to male readers because of Walker's "supposedly overly negative portrayal of African American men" and her "representation of the unrepresentable" (Abbondato 1113). In a sense, the black women's discourse in this novel also subverts the image-making about them in the mainstream media constructed by white males. However, this novel still largely shows the negative images of black men, making them look like "screwed up" "brutal bastards" (Milloy B3). In 1986, another article in *New York* magazine (Denby 56) labeled the subversive sexuality of this novel as incendiary "candy passing itself off as soul food."

<sup>16</sup> In response to this, John Simon (56) comments in the *National Review* that *The Color Purple* is "unable to transcend the two humanly legitimate but artistically burdensome chips on its shoulder, feminism and Black militancy."



with the economic independence she wins with the sewing, quilting, and clothing enterprise in which she works with other African American women under the same roof in the workshop. Reluctant to be treated as a helpless object, Celie uses clothing design as a form of creative self-expression. Such a form of entrepreneurship becomes a means for her self-sufficiency. Walker seems to imply that sewing as a domestic chore can be a crucial means for a woman to free herself from oppressive situations. After Celie inherits the old property of her family, she wins her economic independence through the accumulation of money, stories, business, and a circle of friends to become a fully autonomous woman.

By contrast, in *The Bluest Eye*, the movie industry in Hollywood is one of the mechanisms that perpetuate negative images of American blacks. As borne out by Pecola's mother Pauline, the pleasure of femininity and sexuality provided by the culture industry, namely the silver screen, immediately provides a context in which black girls can depend and affirm their continued existence:

... Then the screen would light up, and I'd move right on in them pictures. White men taking such good care of their women, and they are all dressed up in big clean houses with the bathtubs right in the same room with the toilet... (BE 123)

Historically speaking, such cooptation was partly facilitated by the migration of African-Americans to northern industrial cities like Lorain, where the novel lays its scene, in the first half of the twentieth century. Removed farther away from the common culture of the rural South, the network of their communities was undercut, causing members to be reluctant to drop by and look after each other. Such a process of displacement or such a sense of being uprooted accelerated their separation from friends and families, thus forcing them to look elsewhere for a self-affirming context after they felt they had been isolated from the past.

In the absence of alternative cultural models, black females were unable to validate and endorse a virtue or to provide another competitive set of definition for femininity without having them tied up with mass-produced fantasies about women's physical beauty, even if they did not repulse the ethnic distinctiveness of African American girls. Pauline's immersion in the pleasure of the movie images reflects her desire for a presumably idealistic life which she does not have, and is unable to enjoy, except when she casts herself in the role of an ideal servant in her employer's household.

As Modleski (93-94) puts it, mass-produced items and images projected in commercials negatively affect a woman's behavior and attitudes toward sexuality. Also affected are those who interact with her on the level of the body. In order to experience and understand sexuality on her own, a girl tends to objectify herself based on types such as hairstyle and fair skin. Geraldine's adaptation to the standards of white beauty, Pauline's imitation of Jean Harlow's hairstyle, and the way the three prostitutes convert themselves from one feminine type to another are all cases in point. The fact that

Claudia's sister Frieda is also reduced to objectified types indicates that black girls widely project themselves in the images of white ladies in favor of a denial, repression, and abnegation of their own ethnic experience. After they deliberately edit and bleach out their bodies, an endeavor encouraged by the movie industry, black appearances, histories, and cultures are supplanted accordingly.

Awkward (72) agrees that the reason why Claudia feels repulsive arises from her inability to accept the standards of white America. As the narrator of *The Bluest Eye*, Claudia desires to dismember the little white dolls in search of the dearness, beauty, and desirability that have escaped her. Implicit in her retaliation against whites is an endeavor to claim back the specificity of bodies, places, ethnic histories, and the root of black communities. Claudia's cruel hatred for Shirley Temple, the presence of *Bojangles* in the movie, and the white dolls that do not look like herself but were given to her as a Christmas gift in place of what she really prefers is an unproductive tactic and action without meaning, simply representing her resentment at the system she is eager to dismantle.

As for the real heroine Pecola, mass circulation of femininity and the image-making by mainstream media have gestated in her an eagerness to disclaim her connection with African American culture. Instead, what she desires is to substantiate for herself a bland respectability in conformity with the portrait of the female body featured by store-bought images promoted by mass commodity culture. Since she has been brainwashed into identifying with women based on her non-representation (i.e., the false belief that being white is beautiful), her female subjectivity is slowly "objectified" by the popular iconographic representation into "the bluest I."

## V. With or without a Phenomenal Selfhood?

If the essence of self-hood consists of voice and visibility in solidarity, the distinct language with which Celie articulates her unique existence enables her not only to cross what Myles calls the "borderlands" (44-45) but also to recover from marginalization. For the development of her female subjectivity, she performs an act of radical transgression into different landscapes where she has the biased order of sexist and racist hegemony redefined.

Marginalized society refers to the place where the existence and history of black females are threatened and where the communal or personal uplifting transformation must be actualized. Otherwise, African-American women cannot exceed or transcend oppressive boundaries for the renewal and development of their female consciousness. Literally or figuratively speaking, such borders can be physical, psychological, or metaphysical. Once the scope of black female vision is broadened after crossing the borders, their newly acquired identities can enable them to open new landscapes for their racial and gender consciousness.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Morrison uses the color imagery of blue in *The Bluest Eye*, the eye color of white Anglo-Saxon girls, to indicate that many black females have been socialized, or, to be more specific, sexualized, into the images

Unfortunately, Morrison's Pecola is misled, in the process of sexualization, to identify herself in accordance with whatever appearance and behavior of the properly idealized white women as prescribed by the medium of the Hollywood film industry in the forties. Constant circulation and mass dissemination of the popular images such as the faces of Ginger Rogers, Jean Harlow, Greta Garbo, and Shirley Temple in *The Bluest Eye* exaggerate and reintroduce romantic love and physical beauty in a way that has excluded both the standards and the cultural modes of African-American females.

Without doubt, feminist writers such as Morrison and Walker seek to explore into the historical context of women's treatment and occupations. Since a woman's consciousness of the self is largely defined by gender, both writers explore the social, political, and personal meanings of being female. They support the notion that a transformation of female subjectivity can either empower or undermine the consciousness of her individuality.

The essential process of self-definition has long been complicated and intervened by the patriarchy of a repressive society that tends to define female writers as excluded, displaced, and disinherited. As black feminist viewers and readers, Morrison and Walker draw on their self-defined liberative acts of moving from pained and marginal existence to power. Through their conscious act of refiguring black women in the hegemonic order of patriarchal supremacy, both writers struggle to remain at the center of dominant discourse, aiming to contextualize the stereotypical images of black females whose quality of life is affected by their identities and the relationship among sexism, classism, and racism.<sup>18</sup> To elaborate on black female subjectivity, both writers use their narratives of (non)resistance to highlight the daily abuses faced by their heroines, believing that the ideology of resistance, once politicized and initiated, can enable an expansive and creative self-actualization for readers and fictional characters alike.

In terms of Metzinger's SMT, Pecola never experiences the contents of her conscious self as the contents of the representational process. Instead, she simply lives in the world right now as in a depersonalized state where consciously experienced first-person perspective does not exist. In other words, caught in a system of naïve self-misunderstanding, Pecola experiences non-subjective consciousness as a pure or disembodied spirit. The attentional unavailability, i.e. being "not attentionally available" in Metzinger's words (331), or distortion of the earlier information processing system in Pecola's brain, makes her phenomenal representation transparent, causing her system to be entangled in naïve realism without the prospect of reaching "introspection" (263). As

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onto which they project themselves in tandem with the image of femininity engineered by mainstream society. On the contrary, Walker uses "the color of eggplant" (CP 84) and "the color purple in a field" (CP 191) as created by the un-gendered God to stand for the assertion of one's ethnicity in resistance to the image-making by mainstream society.

<sup>18</sup> Morrison's tone is not as overly aggressive and antiseptic as that of Walker whose language reveals pain and detached numbness that can easily bring readers into the detached society in which Celie lives. In Celie's first-person account of the institutions of sexism and racism, she succumbs to the belief that to fight back against men is too dangerous, fatalistic and self-defeating. In fact, minor characters such as Shug, Squeak, and Sofia all use ironic repartees and backtalk to negotiate legitimacy with white men in the face of sexism and racism (CP 90).

her phenomenal experience is overshadowed by a pseudo- or “untranscendable” realism,<sup>19</sup> she is vulnerable to being plagued by psychiatric disorders or schizophrenia.

As elaborated by Metzinger (563), if a representational state cannot be integrated into the phenomenal self model, it automatically becomes “a part of the world-model and its content is now experienced as external.” Pecola’s blue eyes drop out of the phenomenal self because her system is for some reason unable to integrate them into the globally available partition of her self-model. Phenomenally speaking, those blue eyes would then not be her own body part anymore. In Metzinger’s terms, it is an “out-of-body experience,” a specific kind of phenomenal content “normally constituted by the bodily self in the absence of a body” (488).

In contrast to Pecola’s “phenomenal transparency,” Celie’s phenomenal self-consciousness is underlined by “all higher-order and conceptually mediated forms of self-consciousness, and this nonconceptual form of selfhood constitutes the origin of the first-person perspective” (158). It is this phenomenal selfhood that makes Celie an experiential subject.

Out of conceptual necessity, this paper operationalizes Metzinger’s SMT to explain how Celie’s personal identity develops in her conscious experience, a process through which she acquires her intrinsic essence, individuality, and above all substantiality. Her phenomenal experience enables her to become a unique, indivisible, and independent entity that in principle exists all by itself in the possession of intrinsic properties and an unchangeable “innermost core” (563). Such a conscious and representational content on the level of phenomenal experience is evolutionally advantageous and epistemically justified, because her phenomenal property of the epistemic subjectivity is closely correlated with her phenomenal selfhood. As she experiences herself as “being identical through time,” (302) her phenomenal self-consciousness develops into a “coherent whole” capable of acquainting herself with the fundamental contents of self-consciousness. As testified by Metzinger in his clinical history, one of his patients who had been repeatedly sexually abused by her stepfather successfully integrated “the different phenomenal selves in the course of a therapeutic process” (524). In the end, she attempted to “save her personal integrity by splitting her phenomenal self,” a case highly reminiscent of what Celie has been through in the preceding textual analysis.

Celie’s case exemplifies a perceiving self as the subject component of “the self- or subject-model;” while Pecola remains in her perceived self as an object component that is, technically speaking, only a “system-model, but not a subject-model,” to borrow Metzinger’s terms (489). Unfortunately, Pecola’s phenomenal selfhood (i.e., the phenomenal content of the internal representational behavior or states) never becomes real. In contrast, Celie’s subject component is formed by the content of her currently subjective

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<sup>19</sup> In French existentialist feminist Simon de Beauvoir’s classic *The Second Sex*, transcendence means men’s free-subjectivity above mere life. In comparison, women can only exist as victims in the processes of nature that repeat in endless cycles —“maimed, mutilated, dependent, confined to a life of immanence and forced to be an object.” As proposed by Beauvoir, while humanity transcends, women are imprisoned to a life of immanence. Please see Rosemarie Tong’s *Feminist Thought*. p. 210.

phenomenal self underlying a much higher degree of coherence and stability. In Metzinger's dialectic of intentionality relation, Celie experiences herself as the thinker of her own thoughts. Capable of consciously experiencing the cognitive first-person perspective as a rational and introspective individual, Celie not only portrays a self in the act of knowing but also exercises mental representations within herself in a goal-directed manner.

In a larger context, what is so characteristic and suggestive about black women's writing, including that of Walker and Morrison, is:

... its interlocutory, or dialogic, character, reflecting not only a relationship with the 'other(s),' but an internal dialogue with the plural aspects of self that constitute the matrix of black female subjectivity. The interlocutory character of black women's writing is, thus, not only a consequence of a dialogic relationship with an imaginary or 'generalized Other,' but a dialogue with the aspects of 'otherness' within the self. (qtd. in Snelling 110) <sup>20</sup>

As feminist writers, both Walker and Morrison seem to believe that subjectivity and consciousness can be realized by crossing fixed boundaries, a movement from beyond, within, and in-between what Myles calls "space of difference" (4). <sup>21</sup> Drawing on the perspectives of other black feminist predecessors, such as Pauline Hopkins, Nella Larsen, Ann Petry, and Paule Marshall, both Morrison and Walker are concerned about how to substantiate a change to black female identity, focusing on the challenges faced by their protagonists as to how to move toward the self outside the view of hegemony and how to rejuvenate their female psyche simultaneously.

### Conclusion

If subjectivity is defined as a sense of the self and identity, it also means a stream of consciousness. Without a doubt, Celie's letters "constitute the matrix of black female subjectivity" with her inner private speech flowing uninterrupted. She finally manages to make sense of the chaotic and disorganized world, restore her faith in humanity, and come

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<sup>20</sup> The borrowed words are from Mae Gwendolyn Henderson (1989: 17-18), as quoted by Sonia Louise Snelling in her doctoral thesis, entitled "'I had imagined myself into being': Storytelling Girls in Children's Fiction from the Beginning and End of the Twentieth Century," p. 110.

<sup>21</sup> This expression also means shuttling in and out of subjectivity. To Myles, space or border also means the community. Female transformation presupposes locating space for the development of female subjectivity (66). Treating the growth of female subjectivity as a recurring theme and concern, Myles foregrounds the theoretical frame of "transient women" as a new working model that aims to explain how black females can affirm their subjectivity. The word "space" also corresponds to Carla Peterson's concept of the margin as a radical space of openness and possibility. As the site of both repression and resistance, this space serves as a point of departure for black female consciousness to develop. However, the marginal space here is not necessarily secure or creative, causing many unable to construct new identities and perspectives of black womanhood (Peterson 7).



to peace with nature in the belief that God is not merely a man but “everything” (CP 286). Celie’s subjective inner-workings are further consolidated by sisterhood and racial consciousness into a shared feeling of care and affection among female co-ethnics, a concept similar to what Gabriel Marcel called “inter-subjectivity,” meaning the process of psychological energy moving between two or more individuals partaking in a public world.<sup>22</sup> In her textualities, Walker essentializes Celie’s “phenomenal self-consciousness” by subverting the policing power of the state in particular and shattering the boundaries of geopolitical spaces in general; whereas, Morrison’s Pecola is unable to stand up, express herself, have a life full of joy, attain belongingness and realize self-determination. In a state of “phenomenal transparency,” her “out-of-body experience” and “disembodied spirit” cannot be transformed into strength and a changed female consciousness. Unlike Celie, Pecola never consciously experiences the phenomenal property of her selfhood in the sense that she never goes through any liberating and self-defining stage of development that is either transgressive or transformative enough to qualify her as a “transient woman.”<sup>23</sup>

Lacking relationships with female friends who can help her anchor her orientation (i.e., intersubjectivity), Pecola is unable to heal and develop a unique life perspective, allowing her split consciousness, shattered sense of self and inauthentic subjective identity to be misled, submerged and overwhelmed by commodity culture and what Hennessy calls capitalistic consumerism (73-74). Her reluctance to overcome obstacles for the maintenance of an independent subjectivity results in a gendered and racialized subject-hood, the one as prescribed by relentless and inexorable society. Since subjectivity means consciousness of self in relation to others, Pecola never seeks to change the opposing views held by the dominant white males about black females. As a result, she relegates herself to a permanent status of the “others” whose existence is for the subjects to observe, instead of observing them as subjects in return. In contrast, Celie’s life history can be integrated into the generic elements of resistance over submission. Like Walker who creates her, Celie also perceives literacy or letter writing as a liberative tool with which to engage in her ethics of resistance. She aims to elevate herself into the realm of racial and gender consciousness, ultimately causing her phenomenal selfhood to be closely related with the phenomenal property of her epistemic subjectivity. Her narratives in the latter half of the novel even epitomize the cogent textual evidences that constitute

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<sup>22</sup> Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973) was a French existentialist or philosopher of existence who argued that active participation may be either objective or non-objective. Non-objective participation may include subjective participation. However, non-objective participation may also include intersubjective participation. Intersubjectivity (or shared subjectivity) may bring unity to our being in the world. Please see Thomas Anderson’s *A Commentary on Gabriel Marcel’s The Mystery of Being*.

<sup>23</sup> Myles (9-10) proposes a five-stage process for a heroine’s transformation into a woman with enlightened subjectivity. These five stages are conceptualized as essential, because black females must recuperate their history from their colonizers through these five stages. They are: innocence, consciousness, rebelliousness, flight, entering women-centered places for renewal, and reentry into hegemonic society. According to Myles, when a “transient woman” engages in and completes these five stages, she can move toward sites outside the dominant order. The theoretical structure of Myles’ five-stage model has been treated as a paradigm by which to examine how African American women shift toward self redefinition, maintain spiritually and physically intact in resistance to violence, and save their history and time from extinction.

the transnational dimension of the slavery system.

Moving beyond the intricacies of enslavement, Walker and Morrison explicate their works in such a way as to allow readers to access, illuminate, and investigate the shaping influences of slavery. Only after the vivid accounts of violence and deprivation under that system are fully studied can readers recover from the crippling effects of Jim Crow laws and their suppressive hegemony. In sum, Morrison and Walker as literary figures have a troubled and tormented relationship with the female identity. As female writers, writing is an agony for each, because gender is a painful and debilitating obstacle in the Jim Crow context. Both writers try to read and write in multiple voices, and their works indicate that African American female writers can also make a great deal of contribution to American multiculturalism as a whole.

This paper focuses on how Celie, as a perceiving self who experiences the cognitive first-person perspective, can avoid repeating the course of life taken by Pecola. To the contrary, as a perceived self existing in the world of phenomenal simulations (as opposed to representations), Pecola lives her life without an egocentric frame of reference, and degenerates from self-effacement to self-destruction after being brainwashed by the mainstream ideas of cultural citizenship. On the other hand, Celie ascends from self-denial to self-affirmation and ultimate empowerment, even if she has been victimized by the combined totality of imperialism and patriarchy. To advance the argument regarding how one differs from the other, this paper laboriously elaborates on the development of female consciousness in a larger context of gender and race in general, or feminism and ethnic identity in particular, along the conceptual framework of the Self-model Theory of Subjectivity (SMT) that seeks to explain the development of one's "phenomenal self." Worth noting is the fact that much more emphases are put on the private sector of family domesticity than the political dimension of racial segregation. It is believed that succeeding topics like this in either literary or cultural studies, including the study of feminism, could significantly provoke more studies in the future.

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